

**New Mexico Department of Health Office of Epidemiology
New Mexico Scientific Laboratory Division
US Federal Bureau of Investigation/Albuquerque Office
New Mexico Department of Public Safety/Homeland Security Department**

***GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING SUSPICIOUS
LETTERS OR PACKAGES***

REVISED: January 23, 2003 (Original: October 19, 2001)

Assessing Credible Threat Related to a Suspicious Letter or Package

The New Mexico Department of Health Office of Epidemiology (NMDOH EPI), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)/Albuquerque Office, New Mexico Department of Public Safety (DPS)/Homeland Security Department, other law enforcement, or fire and hazardous material (HAZMAT) personnel may be asked to assess the credibility of suspicious letters, packages, and other potential threats. The following outline is provided to help assess whether a letter or package represents a credible threat (refer to flowchart at end of this document):

QUESTION: Does the letter or package have EITHER of the following criteria for a CREDIBLE THREAT?

- Letter or package with an explicit threat (substance need not be present).
- OR**
- A letter or package that is suspicious for a bomb or other hazardous material, e.g., ticking, protruding wires or foil, unexplained material leaking from package.

IF YES – FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

- ➔ Have caller contact local police. If the caller is at work, then also have them report the incident to an available supervisor or building security official.**
- ➔ NMDOH EPI, DPS, local law enforcement, or HAZMAT personnel should contact the FBI at 505-224-2000.**
- ➔ Instruct the caller not to handle the package, and to leave the room, close the door, and section off the area to prevent others from entering. If possible, turn off local fans or ventilation units in the room.**
- ➔ REFER TO APPENDIX 1 FOR ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS**

QUESTION: Does the letter or package have material present, whether opened or unopened (e.g., powder spilling)?

IF YES – REVIEW OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LETTER OR PACKAGE:

- Is there a logical explanation for the letter/package or material?
- Is the letter/package “suspicious” because it is unfamiliar?
- Is there a return address? Is the return address known to the recipient?
Can the recipient contact the return address to confirm that they sent the item? Is the return address a reputable company conducting normal business?
- Did anyone actually see the material?

IF THERE IS DEFINITELY MATERIAL PRESENT THAT CANNOT BE LOGICALLY EXPLAINED, THIS REPRESENTS A CREDIBLE THREAT. FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

➔ **Have the caller contact their local police. If the caller is at work, then also have them report the incident to an available supervisor or building security official.**

➔ **NMDOH EPI, DPS, local law enforcement, or HAZMAT personnel should contact the FBI at 505-224-2000.**

➔ **How to handle the letter or package if material is present that represents a credible threat:**

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
- Do not smell, taste, or touch the material.
- Do not try to clean up powders or liquids.
- Place the envelope or package in a sealed bag or container. A transparent container such as a ziplock bag or plastic storage container is preferable. If a container is not available, then cover the letter or package.
- If possible, turn off local fans or ventilation units in the room.
- Leave the room and close the door, and/or section off the area to prevent others from entering.
- Anyone who handled the item should wash their hands with soap and water.
- If the material spilled out onto clothing, remove contaminated clothing and place in sealed plastic bag. Shower with soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or harsh disinfectant on your skin.
- If possible, obtain a list of all people who handled the letter/package or were in the room or area when the letter/package was recognized or opened. Give this list to both local enforcement officials and Public Health authorities for further investigation.

➔ **If a room was contaminated by intentional mechanical aerosolization, follow these instructions:**

- Turn off local fans or ventilation units in the area.
- Leave the area immediately.
- Close the door or section off the area to prevent others from entering.
- Report the incident to local police and/or FBI.
- Shut down air handling system in the building, if possible.
- If possible, obtain a list of all people who were in the room or area.

➔ **REFER TO APPENDIX 1 FOR ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS**

QUESTION: Does the letter or package have other suspicious characteristics?

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- No return address/unknown return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Excessive security materials (e.g., heavily taped)
- Visual distractions
- Marked with restrictive endorsements (e.g., “Personal” or “Confidential”)

IF YES - THESE ITEMS MAY OR MAY NOT REPRESENT A THREATENING SITUATION. REVIEW THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LETTER OR PACKAGE:

- Is there a logical explanation for the letter/package or material?
- Is the letter/package “suspicious” because it is unfamiliar?
- Is there a return address? Is the return address known to the recipient?
Can the recipient contact the return address to confirm that they sent the item? Is the return address a reputable company conducting normal business?

If there is not a logical explanation for the letter or package, have the caller contact local police. Alternatively, the caller may place the item in a plastic bag and discard.

QUESTION: If the letter or package does not contain an observable threat or material, but the recipient is concerned, instruct the recipient to place the letter or package in a plastic bag and discard.

This mail does not need to be reported to local law enforcement, FBI, or NMDOH EPI. FBI will not take possession of the letter or package, and testing will not be performed.

APPENDIX 1

Preliminary Investigation of a Letter or Package Representing a CREDIBLE THREAT, Including a Letter or Package With DEFINITE MATERIAL Present

REASSESSMENT OF INCIDENT

Upon notification of an incident, law enforcement dispatchers and responders will conduct an investigation:

1. To reassess whether there is an explicit or implied threat regarding a chemical, biological, radiological agent/device, or explosive device.
2. To confirm whether there is material present. If there is material present, the FBI in conjunction with NMDOH EPI, HAZMAT personnel, local and state law enforcement agencies, and/or other field responders will decide whether the item still represents a potential act of terrorism.
 - ö IF NMDOH EPI and/or the FBI determine that the material is to be analyzed, it should be **APPROPRIATELY FIELD SCREENED PRIOR TO TRANSPORTATION TO THE NEW MEXICO SCIENTIFIC LABORATORY DIVISION (SLD) IN ALBUQUERQUE** (See Field Screen Guidelines below). Representatives from the FBI, local and state law enforcement, and/or local HAZMAT Response Unit will come to the scene to collect the material.
 - ö NMDOH EPI and/or FBI must be notified before any material is sent to SLD.
 - ö Once field screening is completed, the material must be appropriately packaged for transport to SLD (See section below).

FIELD SCREEN GUIDELINES

The New Mexico State Police will coordinate the appropriate field screening of a suspicious letter or package. Field screening insures the safety of all involved: the responders, the transporting agent, and the laboratory personnel. Bomb technical personnel and HAZMAT responders are responsible for donning the appropriate personal protective gear prior to field screening.

The elements of field-testing include **ALL** of the following:

1. A pH survey and combustible vapors survey.
2. A radioactivity survey.
3. X-ray the letter/package for explosives/device. The FBI, in consultation with NMDOH EPI and SLD, may exempt a letter from x-ray field-testing on a case-by-case basis.

SLD MUST have a copy of the field screening results before materials can be accepted for testing.

TRANSPORTATION OF MATERIAL TO SLD (AFTER FIELD SCREENING COMPLETED)

1. FBI, police, or HAZMAT personnel **MUST** complete the appropriate chain of custody forms when transporting materials for testing.
2. NMDOH EPI and/or FBI must be notified before any material is sent to SLD.
3. **The material MUST be appropriately packaged before transporting to SLD.**
The packaging and transporting protocol for delivering materials to SLD is outlined in **Appendix 2**.
4. **Material should be transported to SLD promptly.** Normal hours of operation at SLD are 8AM to 5PM, Monday thru Friday. Please make a reasonable attempt to deliver the material during those hours and call a head for anticipated transport (505-841-2541). If material must be delivered after hours, call the NMDOH EPI on-call epidemiologist (505-827-0006). He/she will coordinate with SLD, FBI, police, and/or HAZMAT personnel to have the material delivered.

PRELIMINARY MATERIAL TESTING AND REPORTING PROCEDURE

1. Environmental samples or other specimens will be tested at SLD using protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). SLD will only accept specimens submitted by the FBI, local or state police, or NMDOH EPI.
2. NMDOH EPI will coordinate the follow-up of results from materials tested at SLD.
 - ö **ALL TEST RESULTS ARE STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.**
 - ö SLD will report results to the senior epidemiologist at NMDOH EPI. The FBI may be given negative test results if requested. Hard copy of test results will be sent to Public Health Emergency Preparedness Unit, c/o Stuart Castle, Program Manager, Office of Epidemiology, NM Department of Health, 2500 Cerrillos Rd, Santa Fe, 87505.
 - ö NMDOH EPI will be responsible for contacting other agencies with test results within 24 hours.
 - ö When indicated, a NMDOH EPI supervisor will be responsible for reporting the incident to the Director for New Mexico Homeland Security Department, NMDOH Secretary of Health, and the NMDOH Public Information Officer.
 - ö The State Police or FBI will be responsible for providing the victim with information about testing procedures and follow-up. Either NMDOH EPI or FBI will notify the victim of final test results. If the victim has additional questions, he/she may contact NMDOH EPI at 505-827-0006.

CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS

New Mexico Department of Health Office of Epidemiology (NMDOH EPI)	505-827-0006
New Mexico Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD)	505-841-2541
US Federal Bureau of Investigation/Albuquerque Office (FBI)	505-224-2000
New Mexico Department of Public Safety (DPS) – State Police	505-827-9300
New Mexico Emergency Operations Center	505-476-9635

APPENDIX 2

PACKAGING AND TRANSPORTING PROTOCOL

1. Place the specimen into a leak-proof transparent plastic bag or a leak-proof container with a tight cover that is labeled "biohazard".
2. Place this bag/container into a second leak-proof transparent bag or container with a tight cover that is labeled "biohazard".
3. Place the second bag/container into a third leak-proof transparent bag or container with a tight cover that is labeled "biohazard".
4. Any liquid or wet samples must be wrapped in absorbent material.

THE DELIVERY PACKAGE MUST BE LABELED WITH:

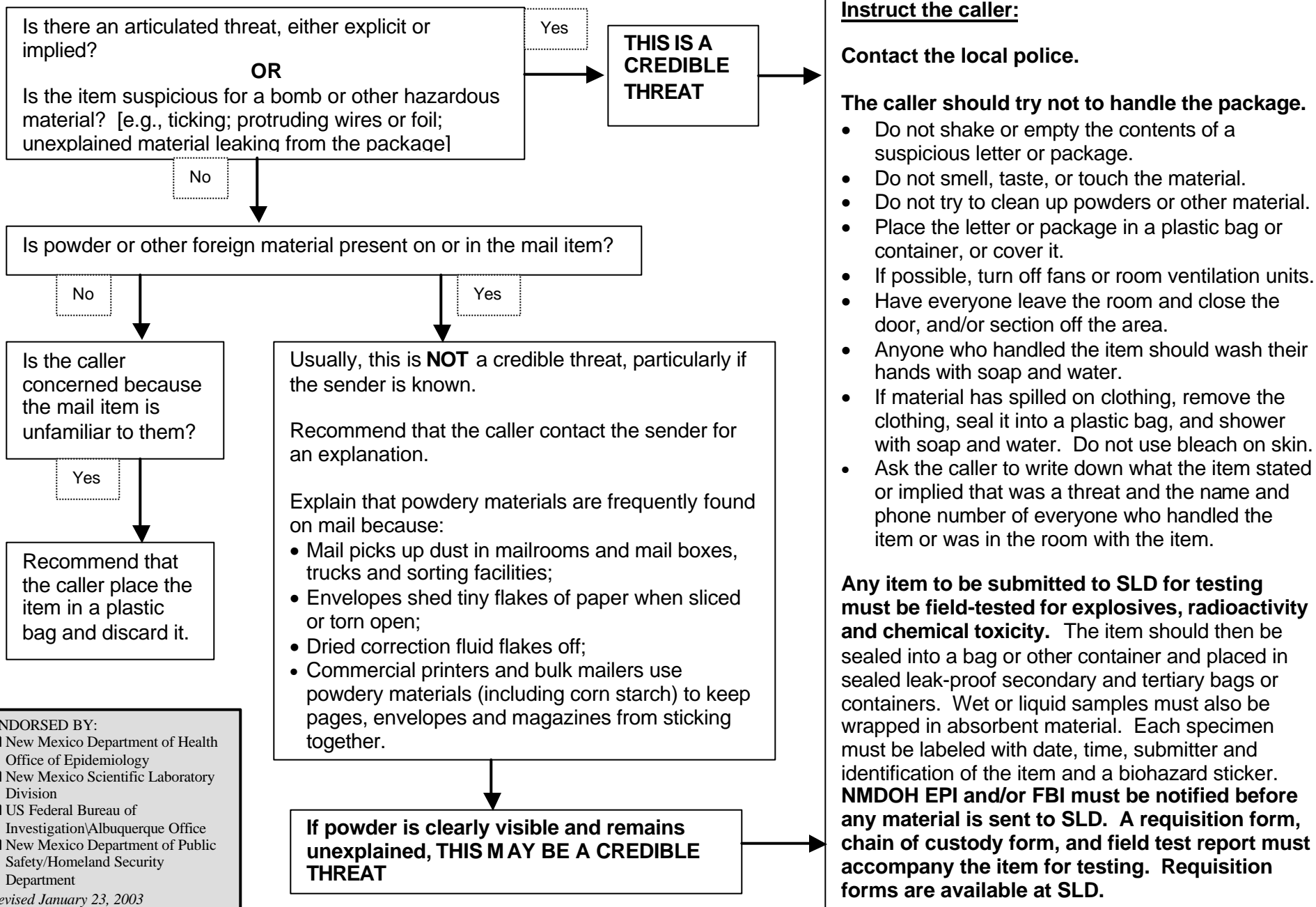
1. Biohazard labels, AND
2. Date, time, submitter name, and identification of the item being transported.

PAPERWORK THAT MUST BE COMPLETED FOR ALL DELIVERY PACKAGES INCLUDES:

1. Requisition form (should be filled out at SLD)
2. Chain of custody form (should be filled out at SLD)
3. Field screening report

Material should be transported to SLD promptly. Normal hours of operation at SLD are 8AM to 5PM, Monday thru Friday. Please make a reasonable attempt to deliver the material during those hours and call ahead for anticipated transport (505-841-2541). If material must be delivered after hours, call the NMDOH EPI on-call epidemiologist (505-827-0006). He/she will coordinate with SLD, FBI, police, and/or HAZMAT personnel to have the material delivered.

RESPONDING TO A SUSPICIOUS LETTER OR PACKAGE



ENDORSED BY:
 New Mexico Department of Health
 Office of Epidemiology
 New Mexico Scientific Laboratory
 Division
 US Federal Bureau of
 Investigation/Albuquerque Office
 New Mexico Department of Public
 Safety/Homeland Security
 Department
 Revised January 23, 2003